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BATMAN
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MESSENGER OF ZEUS!
APARO
ROUGHER

ARKHAM - A DARK AND DISTORTED BOX OF BARRED CUBICLES CRAWLING WITH MADNESS...
I AM ZEUS, IRIS-- YOU KNOW THIS! I AM IMMORTAL-- AND CANNOT BE DENIED!
WHAT DO YOU WISH OF ME, LORD ZEUS?
I WOULD HAVE YOU BEAR A MESSAGE, IRIS--TO THE MORTALS BELOW US...
ARKHAM ASYLUM
DOUG MOENCH — STORY
JIM APARO — ART-LETTERS
ADRIENNE ROY — COLORIST
SCOTT PETERSON — ASSOC. ED.
DENNIS O'NEIL — EDITOR
BOB KANE — CREATOR
MESSENGER OF ZEUS

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G-7592

THE MESSAGE IS THIS, IRIS. THE DUST-BUCKET CAN WAIT.
IT...CAN WAIT?
IT MUST WAIT! DO YOU UNDERSTAND, IRIS?
TELL THEM NOT TO GO THROUGH WITH IT! IT IS DOOMED! THEY CAN NEVER SUCCEED WITHOUT THEIR LORD ZEUS TO GUIDE THEM!
HE IS SIMPLY TOO GOOD FOR THEM, IRIS!
"HE" BEING... YOU, MAXIE?
NOT ME, YOU PATHETIC FOOL! I SPEAK OF THE BAT-DEMON!
OH.
HE COMES FROM THE UNDERWORLD, YOU KNOW-- A DWELLER OF HADES ITSELF!
NOTHING LESS COULD DEFEAT AND SHACKLE YOUR LORD ZEUS - TEMPORARY THOUGH MY CONFINEMENT MAY BE!
AND HE IS FAR TOO POWERFUL FOR THE MERE MORTALS BELOW US! TELL THEM, IRIS -- TELL THEM!
THE DUST-BUCKET MUST WAIT!!
I...
2

...I WILL BEAR YOUR MESSAGE AT ONCE, LORD ZEUS.
KLIK
WE CAN'T CURE. AT BEST, WE CAN MERELY CONTAIN.
GOTHAM
THE CLOUD ROOM
--CALLED IT "A BOX FOR THE BATMAN," CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?
WHAT'S HARD TO BELIEVE--?
MAXIE'S WHACKO--AND HE'S ALWAYS HAD A THING FOR THE BATMAN.
ME, I DON'T CARE WHAT HE CALLED IT--I WANT IT.
GONZO, JOHNNY, TURK, RUBE--CATCH YOU GENTS LATER, HUH?
WE UNDERSTAND, ACE...
...YOU BABIES NEED PLENTY OF SLEEP.
3

ONE LEAVING...
... AND AN EASY ONE TO CRACK.
PAF
"BABY," HUH ?
THE CLOUD ROOM!
SHYIIIH...
PAF
TWUNG
K-CHAK
4

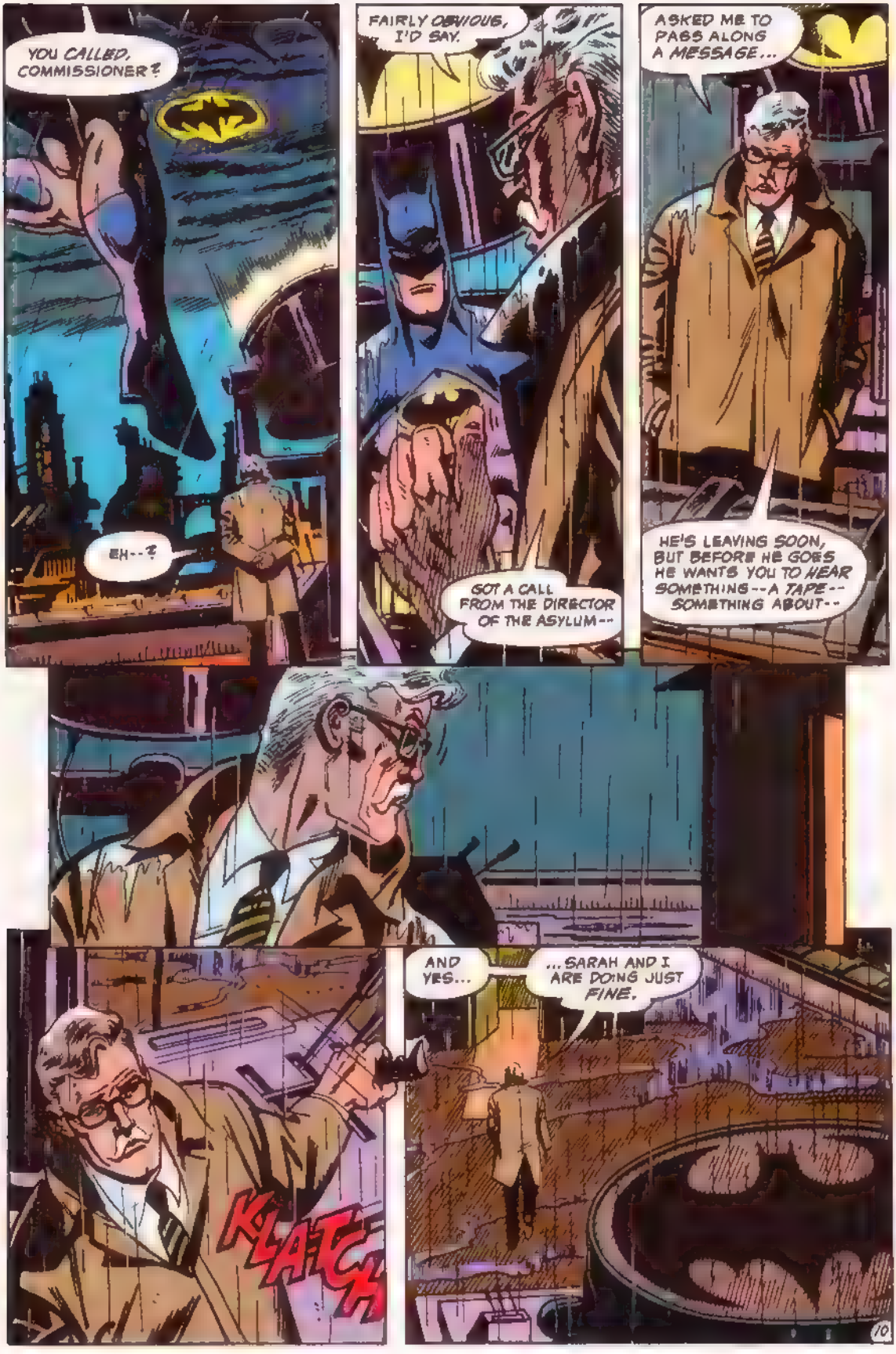
≥HIIIHH≤
ACE PHEENY--OF THE MAXIE ZEUS GANG.
I...N-NO... N-NOT REALLY...
DON'T LIE TO ME, ACE PHEENY.
A-ALL RIGHT... SO I DONE A FEW THINGS FOR 'EM... BUT NOTHIN' BIG... NOT LIKE I'M REALLY INSIDE THE GANG OR NOTHIN'...
WHAT ARE THEY UP TO? WHAT'S THEIR NEXT MOVE?
WHY SHAKE ME DOWN? IT AIN'T LIKE I'M PRIVILEGED OR--
AGH-K!
A-ALL RIGHT... SO M-MAYBE I ...I DID OVERHEAR SOMETHIN'...
5

WHAT?
I...I DON'T REALLY KNOW -- I SWEAR IT-- BUT MAYBE... MAYBE A TRAP... FOR YOU...
A TRAP?
VUUP
I TELL YA I DUNNO... MAXIE'S GONE, SEE... BUT I GUESS YOU KNOW THAT...
...AN' IT'S JUST THAT I HEARD GONZO SAY SOMETHIN' ABOUT "A BOX FOR THE BATMAN" ... AN' JOHNNY, HE SAID HE WANTED IT...
CHAK
...SO I FIGURED IT WAS MAYBE --
GONE?
SO WHY'D THE BOSS WANT THIS THING IN THE FIRST PLACE, ANYWAY?
HEY, WHO KNOWS WHY MAXIE ZEUS EVER WANTS ANYTHING? PROBABLY BECAUSE HE THINKS IT'S HIS...
YEAH, MAYBE HE FIGURED IT'D BRING BACK FOND MEMORIES OF THE LAST TIME HE SAW IT IN 500 BC.-- LIKE SENTIMENTAL REASONS.
6

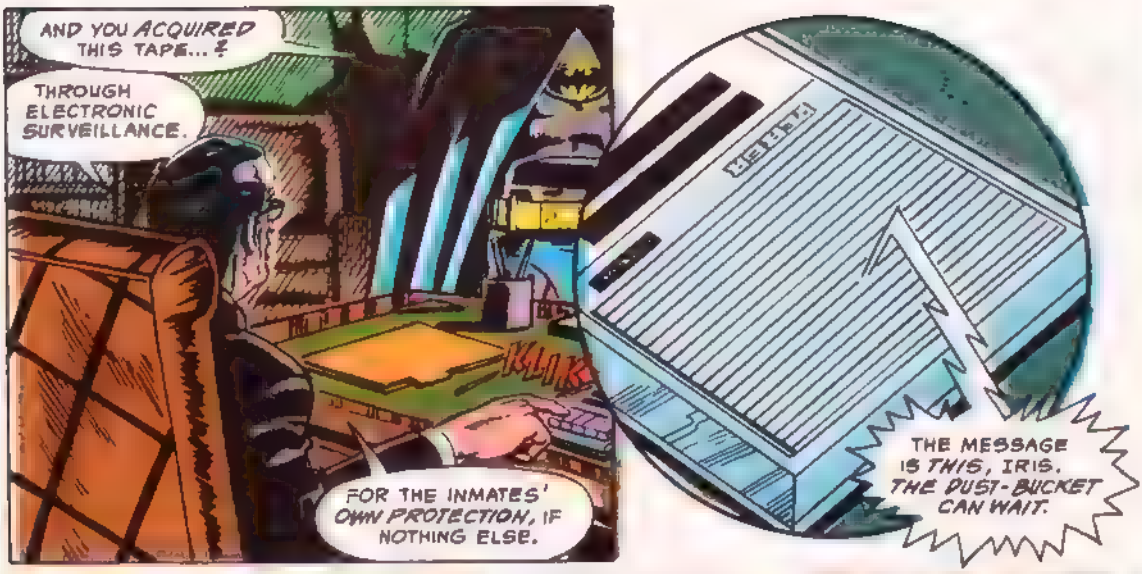
BUT WE WANT IT BECAUSE THE STUPID THING IS WORTH A WHOLE WARE-HOUSE OF MODERN SWAG.
PRECISELY, RUBE...
... WHICH IS WHY WE'VE GOTTA GO THROUGH WITH THE JOB.
WITH MAXIE IN THE NUTHATCH, WE CAN CASH THE THING IN-- INSTEAD O' DUSTIN' AN' POLISHIN' IT EVERY TEN MINUTES FOR HIS LORDLY GAZE.
NO!!
WHAT THE--?
WHO--?
IRIS--?
AND SHE FINALLY FLIPPED ALL THE WAY-- WENT BACK TO HER ROOTS AS A SWING-GIRL...
I BEAR A MESSAGE FROM LORD ZEUS--
--A MESSAGE DESIGNED TO ENSURE YOUR WELL-BEING--
--AND I FIND YOU CONSPIRING TO BETRAY ZEUS BE-HIND HIS BACK!
BAMP

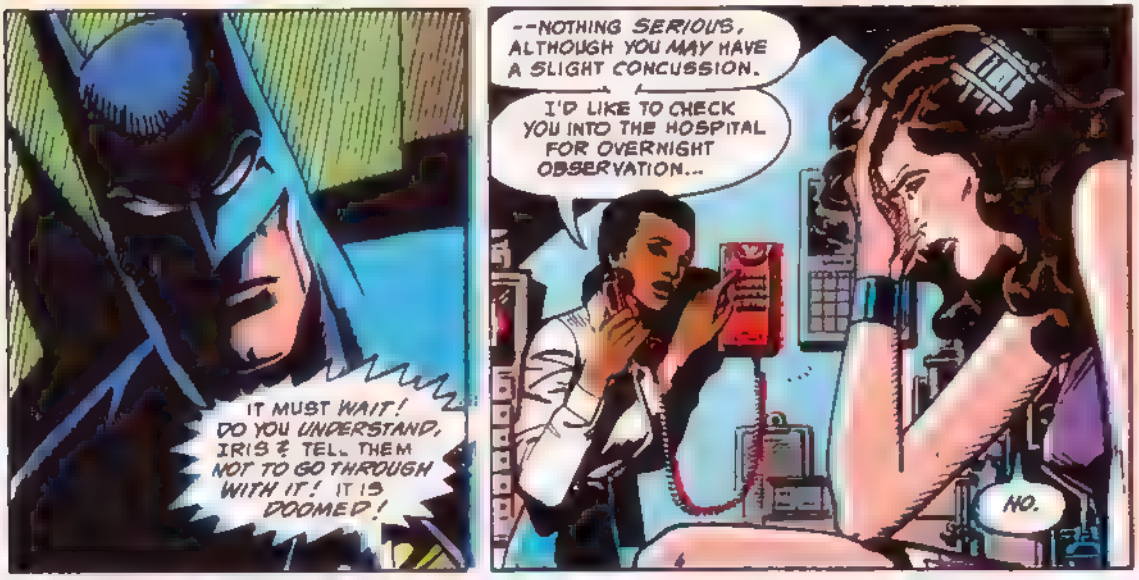
WHAT MESSAGE, IRIS?
YOU DON'T DESERVE TO HEAR IT.
SPIT IT OUT, BABE -- OR I TELL ZEUS YOU DISOBEYED HIM.
VERY WELL -- THE MESSAGE IS THIS...
DON'T TRY TO PULL THE JOB -- NOT NOW -- NOT UNTIL LORD ZEUS RETURNS TO LEAD US.
THE THING'LL BE LONG GONE BY THEN.
YEAH -- AND SINCE WHEN DID SHE START CALLIN' HIM "LORD ZEUS" WHEN HE AIN'T EVEN AROUND?
PROBABLY SINCE MAXIE LATCHED ONTO HER AN' WARPED HER MIND.
LISTEN, THANKS FOR THE MESSAGE, BABE, BUT NO THANKS.
THE JOB GOES OFF AS PLANNED.
NOW YOU ARE DEFYING THE WILL OF LORD ZEUS -- AND I WILL NOT PERMIT IT!
HAH! LIKE A DAME COULD STOP US.
IRIS, YOU BEEN A REAL PAIN LATELY, THINKIN' YOU'RE MAXIE'S SPECIAL ONE, BETTER'N THE REST OF US.
ASK ME, MAXIE NEVER SHOULDA BROUGHT YOU DOWN OUTTA THE CLOUDS -- SHOULDA LEFT YOU UP ON YOUR STUPID TRAPEZE...
8

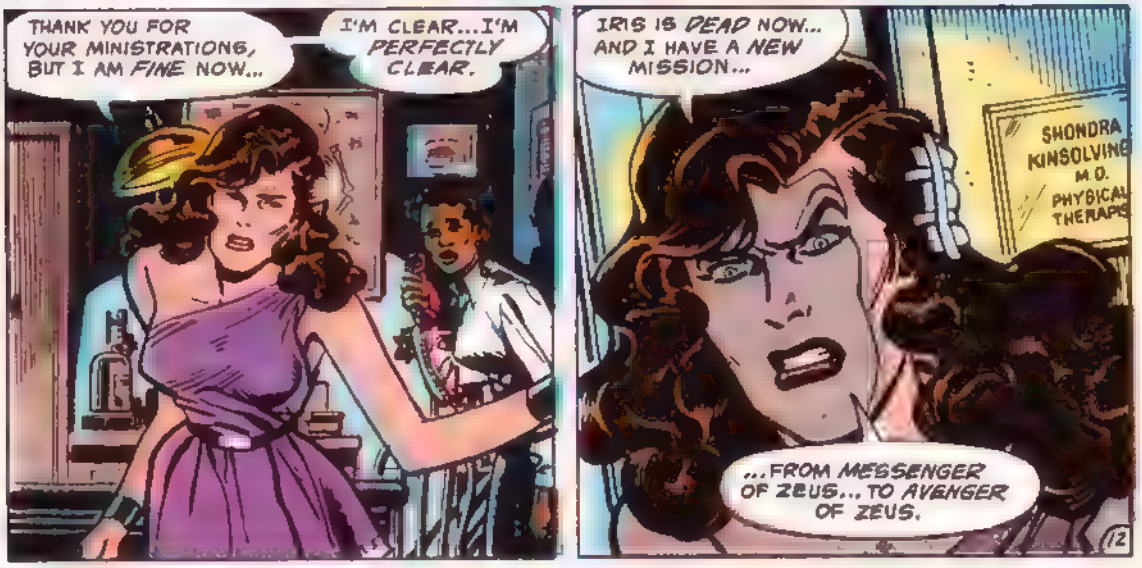
...FLYIN' THROUGH THE AIR!
EASY, GONZO-- SHE'S JUST A DAME!
KLINCH
HO-LEE...
YOU COULDA HURT HER, MAN...
AW, RELAX-- SHE DESERVED IT.
HE...HE REALLY IS OUR LORD... REALLY IS... ZEUS...
SEE--? YOU BRAINED HER SILLY.
HEY, SHE WAS ALWAYS ALMOST AS NUTS AS MAXIE HIMSELF.
...LIKE...LIKE REINCARNATION...
MAYBE SHE NEEDS TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL OR SOMETHIN'...
N-NEVER SHOULD HAVE ...DELIVERED THE MESSAGE...
HEY, LET HER GO, TURK.
COME ON-- WE STILL GOT DETAILS TO DISCUSS.
SH-SHOULD HAVE L-LET YOU BETRAY LORD ZEUS... AND SUFFER THE... CONSEQUENCES...
9

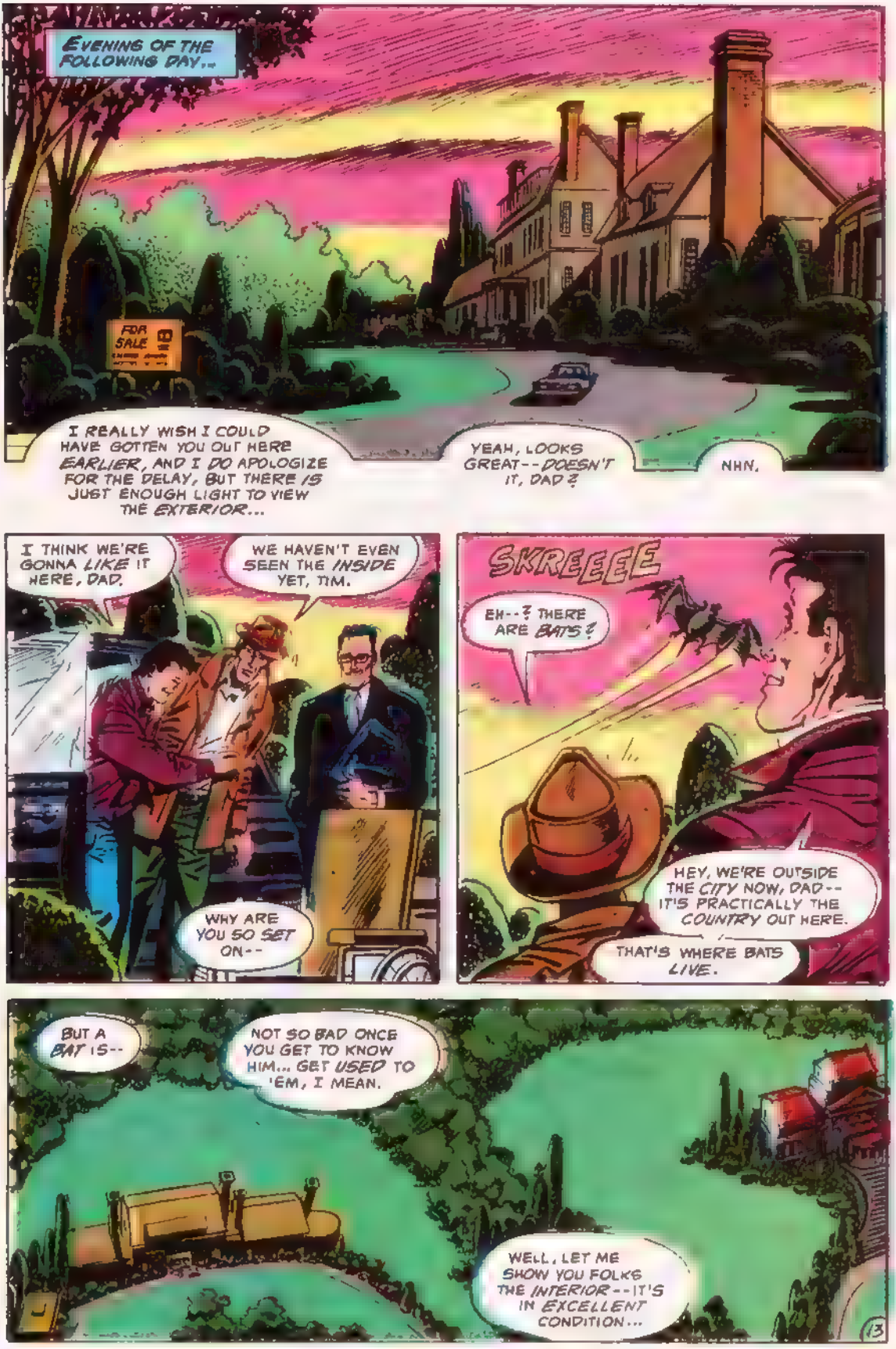

YOU CALLED, COMMISSIONER?
EH--?
FAIRLY OBVIOUS, I'D SAY.
GOT A CALL FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE ASYLUM--
ASKED ME TO PASS ALONG A MESSAGE...
HE'S LEAVING SOON, BUT BEFORE HE GOES HE WANTS YOU TO HEAR SOMETHING--A TAPE--SOMETHING ABOUT--
KLATCH
AND YES...
...SARAH AND I ARE DOING JUST FINE.

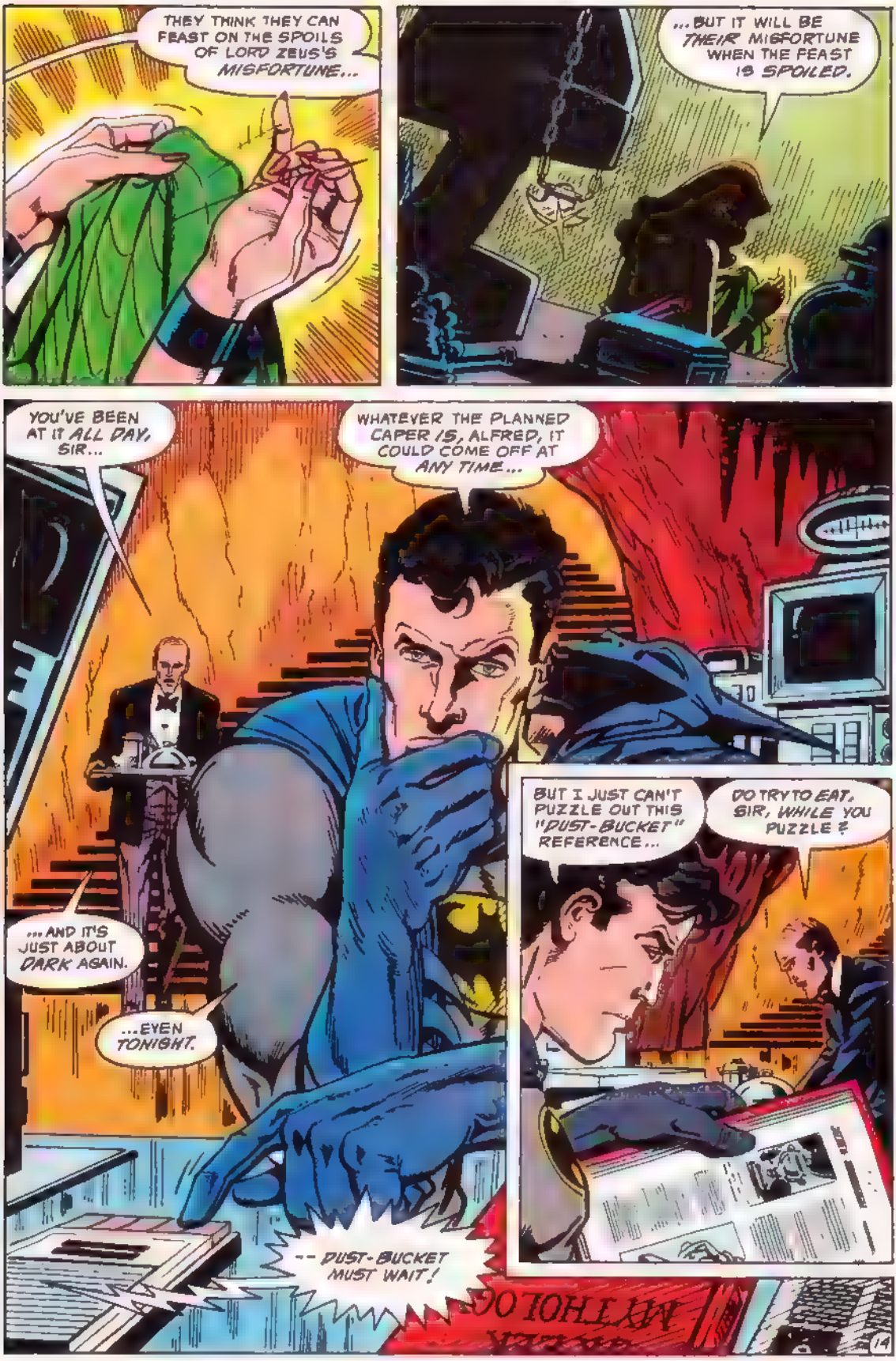
"JUST A DAME," HUH-- ?
THEY'LL FIND OUT...
THEY'LL LEARN THE TRUE MEANING OF FURY...
ARE YOU SPEAKING TO--
YOUR HEAD-- IT'S BLEEDING...
...AND SUFFER... THE CONSEQUENCES...
I THINK YOU NEED HELP-- YOU'D BETTER COME INTO MY OFFICE.
ZEUS TRIED TO PROTECT THEM... FROM THE DWELLER OF HADES... AND THEY BETRAYED HIM...
SHONDRA KINBOLVING M.D. PHYSICAL THERAPIST
EASY... JUST TAKE IT EASY.
--EVIDENTLY HAD PLANNED SOME CRIME BEFORE HIS COMMITMENT HERE AT ARKHAM, PERHAPS TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THOSE MEMBERS OF HIS GANG STILL AT LARGE.
YES...
...I'D GOTTEN WIND OF AS MUCH ON MY OWN.
AH.
WELL, INASMUCH AS YOU ARE REPEATEDLY MENTIONED IN CONNECTION WITH THIS PLANNED CRIME, I THOUGHT IT MY DUTY --PERHAPS MY LAST OFFICIAL DUTY-- TO LET YOU HEAR THE TAPE.


AND YOU ACQUIRED THIS TAPE...?
THROUGH ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE.
KLIK
FOR THE INMATES' OWN PROTECTION, IF NOTHING ELSE.
THE MESSAGE IS THIS, IRIS. THE DUST-BUCKET CAN WAIT.


IT MUST WAIT! DO YOU UNDERSTAND, IRIS? TELL THEM NOT TO GO THROUGH WITH IT! IT IS DOOMED!
--NOTHING SERIOUS, ALTHOUGH YOU MAY HAVE A SLIGHT CONCUSSION.
I'D LIKE TO CHECK YOU INTO THE HOSPITAL FOR OVERNIGHT OBSERVATION...
NO.


THANK YOU FOR YOUR MINISTRATIONS, BUT I AM FINE NOW...
I'M CLEAR...I'M PERFECTLY CLEAR.
IRIS IS DEAD NOW... AND I HAVE A NEW MISSION...
SHONDRA KINSOLVING M.D. PHYSICAL THERAPY
...FROM MESSENGER OF ZEUS... TO AVENGER OF ZEUS.


EVENING OF THE FOLLOWING DAY...
FOR SALE
I REALLY WISH I COULD HAVE GOTTEN YOU OUT HERE EARLIER, AND I DO APOLOGIZE FOR THE DELAY, BUT THERE IS JUST ENOUGH LIGHT TO VIEW THE EXTERIOR...
YEAH, LOOKS GREAT--DOESN'T IT, DAD?
NHN.
I THINK WE'RE GONNA LIKE IT HERE, DAD.
WE HAVEN'T EVEN SEEN THE INSIDE YET, TIM.
WHY ARE YOU SO SET ON--
SKREEEE
EH--? THERE ARE BATS?
HEY, WE'RE OUTSIDE THE CITY NOW, DAD--IT'S PRACTICALLY THE COUNTRY OUT HERE.
THAT'S WHERE BATS LIVE.
BUT A BAT IS--
NOT SO BAD ONCE YOU GET TO KNOW HIM... GET USED TO 'EM, I MEAN.
WELL, LET ME SHOW YOU FOLKS THE INTERIOR--IT'S IN EXCELLENT CONDITION...
13


THEY THINK THEY CAN FEAST ON THE SPOILS OF LORD ZEUS'S MISFORTUNE...
...BUT IT WILL BE THEIR MISFORTUNE WHEN THE FEAST IS SPOILED.
YOU'VE BEEN AT IT ALL DAY, SIR...
WHATEVER THE PLANNED CAPER IS, ALFRED, IT COULD COME OFF AT ANY TIME...
...AND IT'S JUST ABOUT DARK AGAIN.
...EVEN TONIGHT.
-- DUST-BUCKET MUST WAIT!
BUT I JUST CAN'T PUZZLE OUT THIS "DUST-BUCKET" REFERENCE...
DO TRY TO EAT, SIR, WHILE YOU PUZZLE!

-- SUPPOSE IT'LL DO... AND THE TERMS SEEM GENERALLY FAIR... BUT I WANT TO GO OVER ALL THE DETAILS.
EVERYTHING WE NEED IS RIGHT IN HERE, MR. DRAKE.
NHN.
I THINK I'LL TAKE A LITTLE WALK WHILE YOU TWO TALK IT OVER...
YOU KNOW, CHECK OUT THE GROUNDS.
ALL RIGHT, TIM, BUT DON'T BE LONG-- AND BE CAREFUL OUT THERE.
DAUGHTER OF THAUMAS AND ELECTRA... THY FURY SHALL RIDE THE WINDS.
I...I THINK DAD'S GONNA GO FOR IT.
HM? OH... GOOD NEWS, TIM.
YOU ONTO SOMETHING?
YES.
...MAXIE ZEUS'S GANG... SOMETHING ABOUT A "DUST-BUCKET"...
TEK CHEKKA
TEK
COULD THAT "DUST-BUCKET" OF YOURS REFER TO A PRICELESS GREEK FUNERARY URN, CIRCA 435 BC?
EH?! FUNERARY URN--?
15

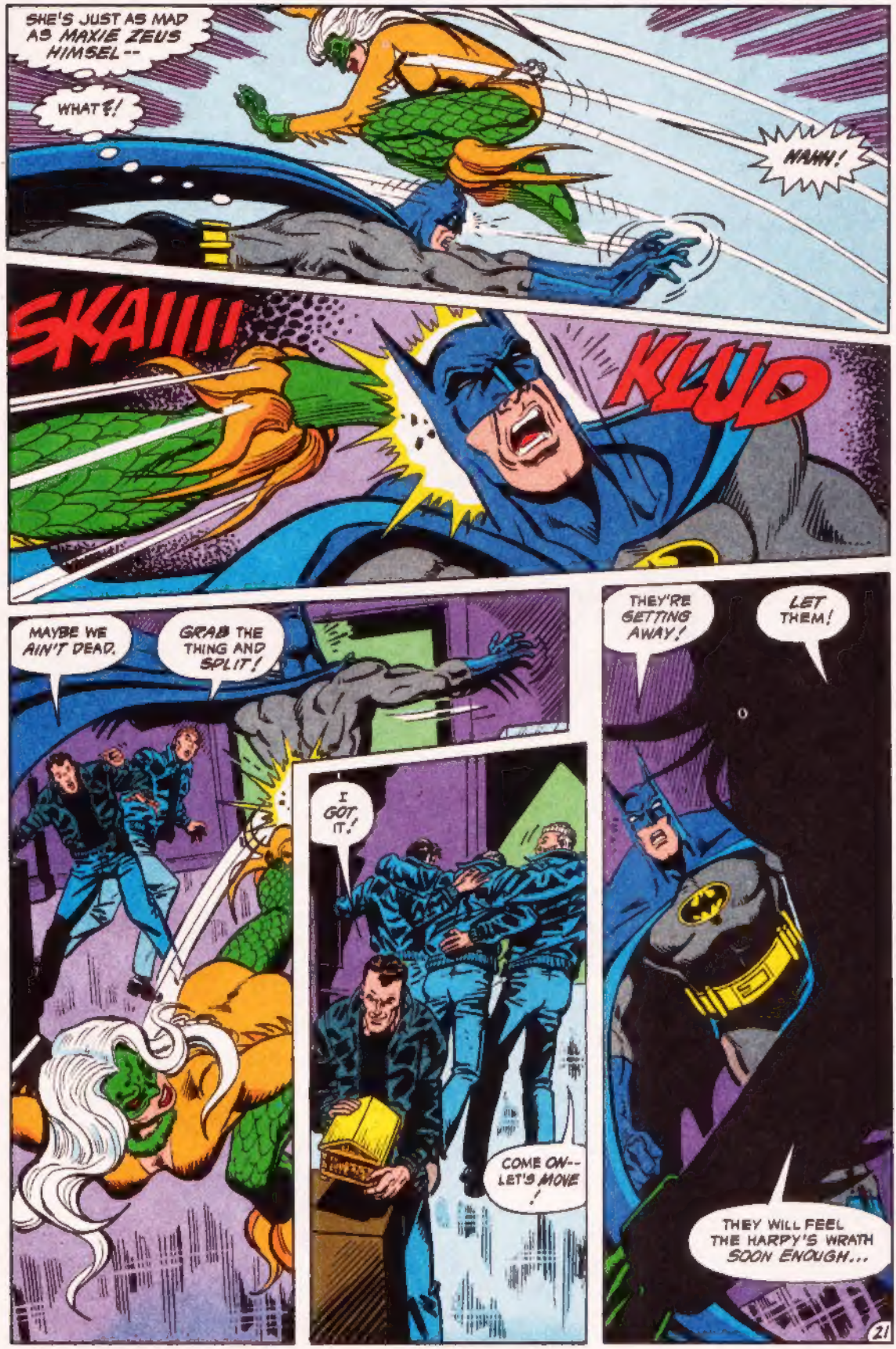
RIGHT ON THE VERY NEXT PAGE...
GREEK M.
ASHES TO ASHES... DUST TO DUST...
HOW'D YOU COME UP WITH THAT SO FAST, TIM?
JUST HACKED INTO TICKETRON AND FOUND A SPECIAL EXHIBIT COMING TO GOTHAM MUSEUM-- RARE GREEK ARTIFACTS, INCLUDING A FUNERARY URN.
STARTS TOMORROW.
WHICH MEANS IT'LL BE IN PLACE TONIGHT.
YOU, UH, MAYBE NEED SOME HELP?
I DON'T THINK SO...
RIGHT NOW, SON, MAYBE IT'S TIME YOU WORRIED ABOUT YOUR REAL FATHER.
KROOOM
LIKE I HAVEN'T BEEN DOING NOTHING BUT.

THE ALARM SYSTEM!
SOMEBODY--
AHN--!
SUPT
ALL RIGHT, LET'S ROLL-- FAST AND SWEET.
SPECIAL EXHIBIT
GLORY OF GREECE
SKREEE
17

WHAT, YOU NEED A SPECIAL TICKET TO GET IN HERE? YOU GOTTA PAY EXTRA?
TOLDJA IT'S WORTH SOMETHIN'...
DOESN'T SEEM LIKE A TRAP...
...BUT WE AIN'T GONNA BE THE ONES PAYIN' FOR IT.
YEAH -- FROM NOW ON, BOYS, WE'RE GONNA BE EATIN' RICH.
YOUR FEAST IS SPOILED, BETRAYERS!
THE HARPY HAS ALREADY SPOKEN FOR LORD ZEUS --
--AND THE WORD WAS NO!!

THE HARPY--?
IS THIS THE TRAP?
SKAA!!!
SPECIAL EXHIBIT
WHAT THE--?!
WHUMP
UMPH!
THUD
OOOPH!
SWOOSH

AHRRR!
SHRREPT
THE BATMAN TOO--?!
BAM
WAKT
WHA--?
CHOK
GUH-H!
WE'RE DEAD.
THE BAT-DEMON?! HE WHO DEFEATED AND SHACKLED LORD ZEUS?!
THRAK
BUT NOW YOU SHALL SUFFER THE VENGEANCE OF THE HARPY!
POK
POK-POK
POK
THERE WAS NO TRAP-- BUT THIS MAY BE WORSE.
WIKT TAK WAKT TIKT
20


SHE'S JUST AS MAD AS MAXIE ZEUS HIMSEL--
WHAT?!
NAHH!
SKAIIII
KLUD
MAYBE WE AIN'T DEAD.
GRAB THE THING AND SPLIT!
I GOT IT!
COME ON-- LET'S MOVE!
THEY'RE GETTING AWAY!
LET THEM!
THEY WILL FEEL THE HARPY'S WRATH SOON ENOUGH...
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NEXT: MADNESS OF THE HARPY

BAT-SIGNALS

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Dear Batman,

I have been a Batfan for quite some time now, but never before have I been so proud to be one! I just read BATMAN #475 and to be honest, I'm flabbergasted! This is what is meant by "great comics." Batman has always been one of the most interesting characters in comic books simply because he is human. That quality allows the reader to identify with the character.

This aspect of the Batman's persona shines through when he sees Vicki Vale kissing another man on page 18. I felt mad, outraged, frustrated and hurt for him, and these feelings were conveyed in a remarkable manner by Alan Grant: "So a man kissed a woman. So what?" and by Norm Breyfogle with his incredible top panel on page 20.

Batman's humanity isn't the only thing making this book the most interesting—the Bat-villains are at the top of their profession. With competition from the Joker, Riddler, Penguin and the Catwoman, how can anybody else expect to shine through? The villains of recent years will certainly leave their own mark—villains such as Anarky, the Idiot and, of course, Scarface. These villains all possess unique qualities that make them as appealing now as the villains of yesteryear. Scarface, one of my personal favorites, is a revamped version (more 90's, if you will) of the classic Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde syndrome. This seemingly innocent and feeble man harbors within him a violent and corrupt personality. Where's the twist? The dark side of this character expresses itself through the tiniest body whereas the more feeble personality shines through a huge body. It's Jekyll and Hyde in reverse without there ever having been two living, breathing and distinct beings—a true villainous masterpiece!

Add to this the masterful plots dug up by Alan Grant, the gothic graphics drawn by Norm Breyfogle (with a recent and wonderful tendency to draw the buildings like those in the film—the police station, for example), the always interesting cast of supporting characters ranging from a boy wonder to the old reliable butler and without forgetting the police commissioner and the rest of the boys in blue. Finally, let me just say this: With stories like "The Idiot Root" and "Destroyer," Batman is headed for great things! Keep up the excellent work, and please bring the Riddler and the Catwoman back for another round.

Philippe Lemieux
Gatineau, Quebec, Canada

Well, Philippe, by now you've already seen the first issue of RUN, RIDDLER, RUN and in just a few weeks you can check out a pair of one-shots in the Prestige Format, namely CATWOMAN DEFIANT and PENGUIN TRIUMPHANT. Do we take care of our readers, or what?

* * * * *

Dear Bat-Signals,

Issue #475 was another great story by Alan Grant! Last issue had me worried. I thought that Alan was losing his touch, but with "Mustache Pete Is Dead" he proved me wrong.

I've never seen Scarface and the Ventriloquist before but I like them. They seem like interesting characters. Norm Breyfogle also did a good—no, a great job on the art. To tell the truth, I think this is the best job he's done in a while. I especially liked the cover. I can already tell I'm not going to like Horten Spence. A tough-guy reporter doesn't seem realistic. That, AND he seems like a jerk.

Why do you keep crossing over with DETECTIVE COMICS? Will the Idiot and/or Zeno ever reappear in this title, or any other Batman title? See ya in thirty.

Justin Daves
Shelby, NC

Scarface and the Ventriloquist are two of the first characters that Alan and Norm ever created together (with the help of John Wagner), back in DETECTIVE #583.

No current plans for a reappearance by the Idiot or Zeno. And what's so unrealistic about a tough-guy reporter?

* * * * *

Batcrew,

I've just finished reading issue #475. Where's Robin? He hasn't seen action in five issues. He belongs in every issue just as much as Batman does. Tim's not just a dumb kid. He's a smart and mature Robin. If it's a question of his not fitting in with the idea of Batman being a dark character, well, Robin can be, too—just read through BATMAN #470. The idea of Robin being "The Boy Wonder" is outdated. Tim isn't just an energetic youth running around with Batman. We see that he thinks about what he's doing and about what's going on in Batman's head. He also is a capable fighter and computer whiz. When Dick was Robin was he a member of the Teen Titans? I see old covers of TEEN TITANS with Dick/Robin on them. If so, give Tim some appearances in the Titans.

Is the Obeah Man alive? And will Tim get his revenge on him? I think you should have a four-part series in BATMAN, guest-starring Nightwing, where Robin gets to go after the Obeah Man.

Back to Batman and Robin. I like the way they relate to each other, like in issue #465. It shows they work together well. I also think that Tim and Bruce are forming a father/son bond, because ever since Tim's mother died and his father was hospitalized for life, Bruce has been the only grownup figure for Tim to look up to.

Speaking of fathers, I don't think Tim's father waking up is a serious problem. He's paralyzed and would have to be looked after all the time. If anything happens he'll live with Tim at Wayne Manor.

There are too many crossovers lately. The recent "Destroyer" crossover puzzled me. I thought that LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT featured stories from Batman's early days. Yet "Destroyer" takes place now and was in it.

If Bruce does show Vicki his secret identity in "The Return of Scarface," I think it would be a good idea. The playboy image isn't "in" anymore. Everyone deserves a family.

Darren Mulbrandt
Saginaw, MI

But would Bruce be the Batman if he had one?

Dear Bat-Signals,

I just got finished reading BATMAN #475. Personally, I think there have been too many multipart stories, starting with "Shadow Box," then "The Idiot Root," then the "Destroyer," and now "The Return of Scarface." I think you should (after "Scarface") return to normal, one-part stories (I'd like to see Mr. Freeze).

Ben "Bat" Pistorius
Middlebury, VT

* * * * *

Dear Mr. O'Neil,

Crossover stories really [stink], sir. For the past few months I've been running back and forth to my favorite local comic book dealers, trying to follow the long, long story unfolding in the JLI books. It has been frustrating. I subscribe to the European half of the title, so I have to go find the American half every month.

I also subscribe to both BATMAN and DETECTIVE, and all during the "Idiot Root" stories, I felt bad for that other guy out there who had to run to the comic book store every month in order to keep up with the missing half of the story.

Now I'm running again, looking for—that's right, LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT. If I really wanted to read LEGENDS (and I don't), I'd subscribe to the damn book. I realize that times are tough for everyone, including comic book producers. But I don't think it's fair to jerk your regular readers around from title to title, trying to follow a single story, just so you can sell a few extra books. As I said in the beginning, it really [stinks], sir.

When you consider that your subscribers receive their issues about a month after a comics retailer does, you can see what a pain in the [neck] it is to try to track down the other half of the story you've become involved in. Occasionally, I've had to brave a Safeway in a more dangerous area of Oakland to find an issue, because they're the only place in town that gets their comics after I do.

So please, *please* try to remember that some of your audience can decide for themselves what they do or don't want to read, that we need no prodding to either pick up, or not pick up, certain titles, and that it is pure aggravation hunting down a book that just happened to sell out the day before.

Respectfully,
Eric Turowski

P.S. Despite my slight irritation, I really do enjoy the books I subscribe to. I'm whining because I care, dammit.

Well, this was unexpected. We had been under the impression that you readers wanted more crossovers. Whenever we did them in the past they were always received very well. But despair not; there'll be no more crossovers for quite a while.

* * * * *

Dear BATMAN people,

I have just read BATMAN #475 and I think it is one of the best Batman comics that I've read in a long time. Scarface is a classic villain and I feel he is a refreshing change from the last few issues. I noticed that things are getting kind of weird between Vicki and Bruce. She is always complaining that Bruce puts on the facade of a pompous playboy. I think that she is right. In all of the Batman titles it seems Bruce Wayne is the "other" personality and Batman is the real person inside. I think you should put more emphasis on the man behind the mask.

Also, I seem to remember that other costumed guy in this title. What was his name again—Bobbin, Dobin, ah yes—Robin! Where the heck did he go? I mean, I know he had a miniseries, but that ended over a month ago! Wherever he is, I bet the letter column hitched a ride on the way.

Paul Dykman
Comics Critic
Lakewood, CA

P.S. Scale of one to ten:
Art—7 Story—8

Letterwriting—9.5 (great last line, Paul...)

* * * * *

OVER IN DETECTIVE COMICS: On sale now, it's "Grounded," the second part of our "Electric City" story. There's a killer with a vendetta on the loose...and the Batman's dead. Can Robin save the day? Find out in DETECTIVE COMICS #645, on sale now, brought to you by Chuck Dixon, Tom Lyle and Scott Hanna.

OVER IN SHADOW OF THE BAT: Because you demanded it...that's right, it's an all-new monthly BATMAN title! There's a new warden at Arkham Asylum—Jeremiah Arkham, nephew of Amadeus Arkham. He's got big plans for the asylum...and the Batman. SHADOW OF THE BAT #1 premieres in just one week. Brought to you by Alan Grant and Norm Breyfogle, with painted covers by Brian Stelfreeze.

NEXT MONTH: Be here in a mere two weeks for the conclusion of "Messenger of Zeus." Iris is gone—only the Harpy remains. She's on the loose, and as insane as Maxie Zeus. Can the Batman find her before she exacts her revenge from those who do not obey Maxie? Find out in BATMAN #482, "The Vengeance of the Harpy," by Doug Moench and Jim Aparo.

—Scott Peterson should have studied his Greek mythology more

From the Den

Last time, I mentioned the advantage fictional heroes have over real-life heroes. The claim was, fiction folk don't change.

But they do—if, like many DC Comics characters, they have existed for decades and have been chronicled by dozens of writers and artists. And so they should. If they *don't* change, they probably don't last. Put any Superman story from 1940 next to a current one and you have no trouble telling which is which. Although both may be enjoyable, the 1940 specimen shows its age in a dozen ways, not least in the characterization of the hero.

So, is Superman the same guy now as he was five decades ago?

I would argue yes. Certain things are different—the slang, the extent of his powers, costume details and, of course, cars and clothes and gadgets of his fictional world—but the basic Man of Steel remains unaltered. What is essentially Superman—the traits that make him unique and unforgettable, that make him an archetype—are the same as they were the hot Cleveland night Jerry Siegel created him almost 60 years ago.

The rule might be, do what you will with the externals and leave the essence alone.

That leaves us with just a single, small, final problem: defining exactly what the essence of a character *is*. Sometimes it's hard to get any seven of a dozen experts to agree.

But that will have to be somebody *else's* single, small, final problem.